

## Cooperation Key at Republican River Compact Agreement Annual Meeting

**By Kari Burgert**

Cooperation—when they weren't saying it, they must have been thinking it.

The Republican River Compact Administration (RRCA), comprised of representatives from Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska, met on August 21, 2018, in Manhattan, Kansas. Cooperation was the overarching theme of this year's meeting, as each of the States' Commissioners to the RRCA highlighted the productivity that was achieved over the past year because of it.

Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NeDNR) Director Jeff Fassett, Nebraska's Commissioner to the RRCA, emphasized the cooperation that was occurring not only among the three states, but also among the various water users within Nebraska. Director Fassett highlighted how the recent agreements made by the RRCA and Nebraska's ongoing compliance with the Republican River Compact (Compact) are

providing Nebraska with more certainty and predictability in our water supply and have allowed us to focus on broader projects to benefit all water users and continue to ensure compliance.

The Republican Basin natural resources districts have worked to invest in compliance with the Compact and have continued to work together with NeDNR to develop a basin-wide water management plan. The Republican Basin natural resources districts and NeDNR have worked closely over the past four years in development of

the plan and held the last of 15 stakeholder meetings in June 2018. The plan is expected to be effective before April 2019, as statutorily required. This plan is discussed in depth in the article "Plan for the Republican River Basin Nearing Completion," beginning on page 3 of this newsletter.



Outlet of Harlan County Dam.



## “Cooperation” Continued

Director Fassett also discussed the investments made by the irrigation districts and funds from Nebraska’s Water Sustainability Fund that have allowed for greater efficiency in the use of surface water. Significant progress was also made over the past year with the United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), Bostwick

Irrigation District in Nebraska, and Kanas Bostwick Irrigation District moving towards a longer-term agreement on operation of the water supplies in Harlan County Lake. USBR Director Michael Black was able to tour the basin with the RRCA this past



Republican River diversion canal.

summer, which Director Fassett is hopeful will bring more federal investment to the Republican Basin.

All three states applauded the efforts to resolve Colorado’s compliance issues from 2003 to 2013. For Nebraska, the resolution of these issues with Colorado resulted in a settlement of \$4 million. As Director Fassett pointed out, Governor Ricketts and the Nebraska Legislature have directed NeDNR to manage the funds from the Colorado settlement towards surface water projects in the Republican River Basin.

Colorado State Engineer and Director of the Division of Water Resources

Kevin Rein, Colorado’s Commissioner to the RRCA, highlighted the expansion and extension of their Conservation Reserve Enhancements Program (CREP) Agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture.

Kansas described their water technology farms, which were created to test water savings with technology while maintaining yield and profitability. The technology farms have been used to promote technology use and share information among water users.

In May 2016, the RRCA Commissioners approved nine years’ worth of Compact accounting, which had languished due to previous disputes and litigation. The accounting information is used to assess the basin supplies and uses and assist in determining compliance with the Compact. Since then, the Engineering Committee of the RRCA, which includes representatives from each state, has been able to exchange data and provide accounting tables for annual approval by the RRCA Commissioners. Also this year, through the Engineering Committee’s work, the three states collaborated to create and publish a new public website with information about the history and administration of the Compact. The website [www.republicanriver.org](http://www.republicanriver.org) provides a wealth of information and resources for learning about the Republican River Basin and the Compact.

As the Commissioners from all three

## “Cooperation” Continued

states highlighted at the RRCA’s annual meeting, management of the Republican River Basin has benefitted greatly from cooperation. This includes cooperation among the three States of the RRCA; among the USBR, Bostwick Irrigation District in Nebraska, and Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District; and among NeDNR,

the Republican Basin natural resources districts, and Nebraska’s irrigation districts. Nebraska looks forward to continuing to work together with Kansas and Colorado to cooperatively administer the Compact and manage the waters of the Republican River Basin.

## Plan for Republican River Basin Nearing Completion

**By Hannah Atkin, Brian Harmon, and Carol Flaute**

After four and a half years, development of the Republican River Basin-Wide Plan is nearly complete. This plan has been developed cooperatively by the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NeDNR), the Upper Republican, Middle Republican, Lower Republican,

“Four public hearings will be held on November 13 and 14.”

and Tri-Basin Natural Resources Districts (NRDs), and a 42-member stakeholder committee representing a variety of water interests across the basin (Figure 1). NeDNR and the NRDs have reached agreement to bring the current draft of the plan to public hearings, which will provide the public with opportunities to present testimony on the plan. Four public hearings will be held on November 13 and 14, 2018. For additional information about the public hearings, members of the

public can contact NeDNR or any of the four Republican NRDs.

This plan will support coordinated management of the basin’s hydrologically connected surface and groundwater supplies. The purpose of the Republican River Basin-Wide Plan is outlined in state statute and described in its mission statement “To sustain a balance between water uses and water supplies so that the economic viability, social and environmental health, safety, and welfare of the Republican River Basin can be achieved and maintained for both the near term and long term.” Statute also requires this plan to ensure that Nebraska continues to comply with the Republican River Compact, which is an interstate water agreement among Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska. This plan was required by the passage of LB 1098 (2014), and it must be completed by April 17, 2019 (*Neb. Rev. Stat. § 46-755*).

## “Plan” Continued

An early step in the plan development process was to recruit members of the stakeholder committee. NeDNR and the NRDs published notices in the summer of 2014 in local newspapers and the Omaha World Herald to spread the word to potential stakeholders. The stakeholder committee met for the first time on March 31, 2015. Stakeholders had a

and June 2018, the stakeholders discussed the challenges and opportunities of water management in the basin and provided ideas that provided a foundation of the plan (Figure 2). Together with NeDNR and the NRDs, the stakeholders created a vision statement and a mission statement to help guide the planning process. At each meeting, the



One of 15 stakeholder meetings at which stakeholders, NeDNR, and Natural Resources Districts worked together to develop the draft Republican River Basin-Wide Plan. Stakeholders represented a variety of water interests from across the Republican River Basin.

range of backgrounds and water interests in the basin, including groundwater and surface water irrigators, livestock owners, irrigation and public power districts, conservation and recreation interests, municipalities, agribusiness, and others. During the 15 stakeholder meetings held between March 2015

stakeholders discussed what to include in the plan, and between stakeholder meetings, NeDNR and the NRDs drafted those ideas into plan language to bring back to stakeholders for consideration at a later meeting. The plan details grew out of the ideas of the stakeholder committee.

The draft Republican River Basin-Wide Plan has clear goals, objectives, and action items developed jointly by the stakeholder committee, the NRDs, and the NeDNR. These goals involve (1) maintaining Nebraska’s compliance with the

Republican River Compact and state laws, (2) maximizing efficient and beneficial consumptive use of water, increasing certainty, and increasing collaboration, (3) positive public relations and information sharing, and (4) pursuit of projects to benefit water supplies and uses that also provide

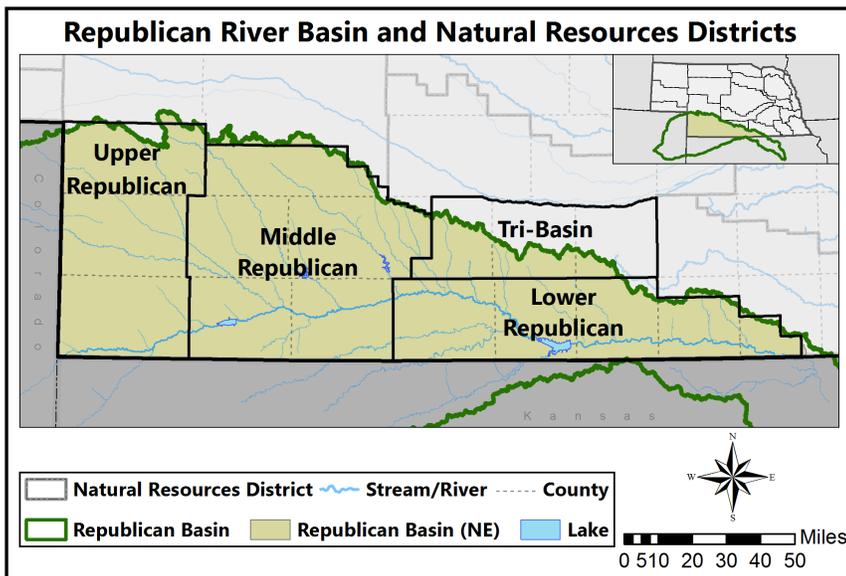
## “Plan” Continued

benefits for fish, wildlife, recreation, or conveyance. Some unique features of this plan include a 25-year implementation timeline and five measurable hydrologic objectives for evaluating plan progress.

In mid-2018, the stakeholders voted on a full draft of the plan. As described in *Neb. Rev Stat. § 46-755 (5)(c)*, the objective of the planning process was to reach agreement on

voted to approve the remaining three sections. Following the stakeholder votes, it became the responsibility of the NeDNR and the NRDs to come to agreement on the plan. NeDNR and the NRDs agreed on plan language that is consistent with either the language the stakeholders voted to approve (for the 13 approved sections) or the language that was most strongly supported by stakeholder votes (for the remaining three sections). The plan was then voted on by each NRD’s board of directors, and the NRDs and NeDNR have agreed on a draft of the plan to bring to a public hearing process, which is described in the first paragraph.

Before adopting the final plan, NeDNR and the NRDs will consider any testimony provided by the public. Once a final version of the plan is adopted, NeDNR and the NRDs will begin implementing the plan’s action items in 2019, and the plan will remain in effect until 2044. NeDNR and the NRDs will meet annually to exchange data and discuss plan implementation progress. Any member of the public is welcome to attend the annual meetings. Every five years, NeDNR and the NRDs will conduct a technical review of plan progress, evaluate based on the technical review whether changes to the plan are needed, and submit a report to the Legislature on plan implementation progress and any needed changes.



A map of the Nebraska portion of the Republican River Basin and the four Republican River Basin Natural Resources Districts.

the plan among all stakeholders, NeDNR, and the NRDs. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, the stakeholder committee unanimously reached agreement on 13 of the 16 draft plan sections, and almost all stakeholders present at the final stakeholder meeting on June 26

## NeDNR Demonstrates SUSTAIN at Annual NARD Convention

**By Carol Flaute**

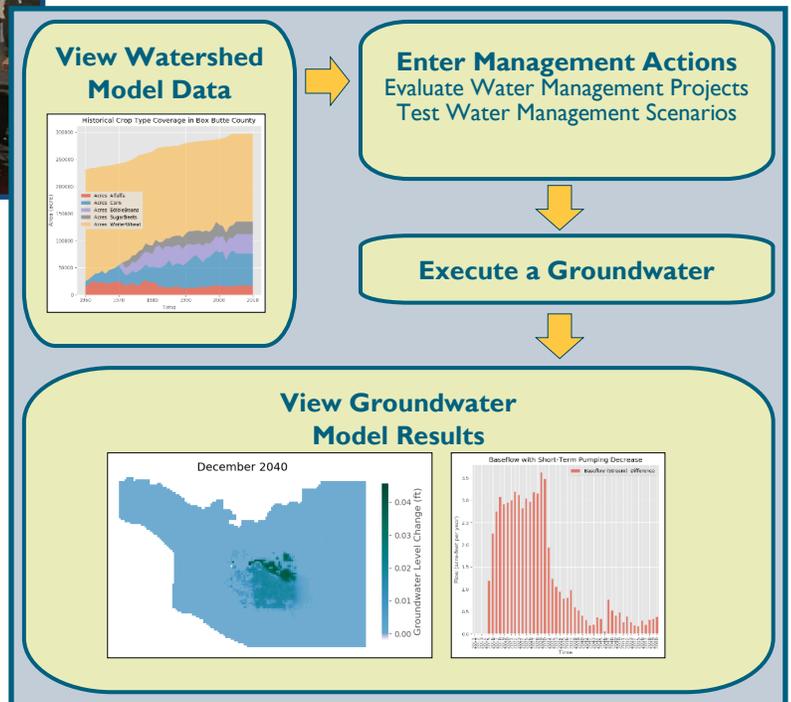
Water Planning Division staff demonstrated SUSTAIN and other tools at the Annual Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) Conference on September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> in Kearney (Figure 1). SUSTAIN is a graphical user interface that allows users to quickly and easily access NeDNR data, view groundwater model inputs, create scenarios, run NeDNR groundwater models, and customize graphs and data for export (Figure 2).



Figure 1, above. Water Planning staff Carrie Wiese, Kari Burgert, and Margeaux Carter demonstrating SUSTAIN and other tools at the Annual NRDs Conference.

At this conference, NeDNR staff also gave two presentations. Carol Flaute, Jessie Strom, Carrie Wiese, and Amy Zoller from the Water Planning Division presented an update on integrated water management activities across the state, and Tim Gokie and Katie Ringland from the Engineering and Technical Services Division presented information about rebuilding Nebraska's dams, current and future flood risk projects, and the City of Beatrice Flood Avoidance study (<http://arcg.is/1LXin5>).

Figure 2, right. SUSTAIN is a graphical user interface developed by NeDNR that allows users to quickly and easily access data, run groundwater models to test scenarios, and customize graphs and tables for exporting results.



## IT Project Updates for Water Administration

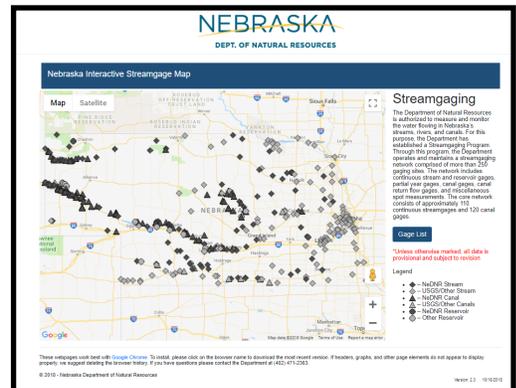
By **Jeremy Gehle**

### Platte Water Accounting Program – PWAP

With the new water year starting on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2018, DNR rolled out the updated Platte Water Accounting Program (PWAP). PWPA is a computer program used by the department to determine the amount of natural flow, storage water, and Environmental Account water in the North Platte and Platte Rivers from Sinclair, Wyoming to Grand Island Nebraska. Most consumers of the data will not notice any change in appearance to the reports generated from this program, but the update was necessary to take the program from Visual Basic 6 to C#.NET to ensure continued uninterrupted operation, and allow for future refinement. Additionally, this most recent upgrade moved the program to a web environment rather than having to run it on a dedicated PC.

### Streamgaging Website

At the same time that we released the new PWAP program we also made a couple of refinements to the Department's streamgaging website. The previous day's daily average and most recent shift (applied to the rating curve) we added to streamgaging stations table list. This small modification allows users to access this data in real-time at their convenience rather than having to drill down into each station individually or wait for an emailed copy of this data. By implementing this update, Department staff no longer have to manually generate six reports and distribute them via email. This was a win-win for the public and our staff. We no longer have to manually generate and distribute the reports, and the public no longer has to wait for the data and can access the data when they need it.



### Water Use Reports

We are in the middle of preparations of for the issuance of our annual Water Use Reporting of surface water project. These water use reports are at this time voluntary throughout the state with the exception of the Republican River Basin where they are mandatory for compact compliance. The voluntary reports can only be submitted via our online application but the mandatory reports in the Republican River Basin can be submitted online or in paper form. The requests for reporting will be sent out to all surface water users around Thanksgiving this year. We ask that they be completed by December 31<sup>st</sup>. Should mandatory water use reports not be submitted from the Republican River Basin, those water users will be issued closing notices.

## Department News

**Kent Zimmerman** has been elected to an Officer position within the National Association of State Conservation Agencies. He will serve as Secretary beginning in January 2019.

**Bob Carnazzo** was honored during the Bethune Cookman vs Nebraska football game before more than 88,000 and on national television for his work with the Red Cross. Congratulations, Bob!

Outreach is an important part of the NeDNR mission. We would like to thank all of the NeDNR staff who helped out at the various events throughout the year:

**Kari Burgert  
Carrie Weiss  
Kevin Schwartzman  
Kim Menke  
Shuhai Zheng  
Cheryl Byler  
LeRoy Sievers  
Jim Williams  
Tom Klanecky  
Curt Inbody  
Margeaux Carter  
John Miller  
Lucas Hadenfeldt  
Jeff Vifquain  
Mike Thompson  
Jeremy Gehle  
Bob Robles  
Jesse Bradley  
Jim Ostdiek  
Tom Schuerman  
Dane Pauley  
Justin Hladik  
Brian Harmon**



If anyone was missed, it was purely accidental. Please let the PIO know, and a correction will be made.

### **Job opening:**

There is an Agency Legal Counsel Understudy position now open in Lincoln. Please go to <http://www.statejobs.nebraska.gov/> and click on "Find a State Job" to view the description. The closing date for this position is "Continuous."